

# THE STABILITY OF MARRIAGE\*

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ONE of the elementary forms of guile by which organizers achieve their ends is to ask their victims, many months in advance, to undertake something that they would be far too cautious to promise to do next week. Thus it was that, last October, I blithely promised Dr. Blacker that I would give a paper this evening. But for all my foolhardiness some instinct of self-preservation counselled caution when I was asked for a title, and I sought for a form of words that would be so wide and so general that it would accommodate almost anything that had occurred to me by the time that I was called upon to redeem my promise. "The Stability of Marriage" seemed a safe enough formula with which to temporize.

It represents, I believe, the point at which all responsible opinion finds common ground on the subject of marriage. It is a commonplace that on this subject, even more than most, we may start from different assumptions and reach different conclusions. We may accept marriage as ordained by God; or regard it as the product of social evolution. We may view it as the private concern of a husband and wife, or as a matter in which society has so vital an interest that in some circumstances it must override the wishes of the couple. Whatever attitude we take, however, we normally accept as self-evident the proposition that it is in the interests alike of individuals and of society that marriage should be stable and enduring. Whatever else we may believe, it is surely plain that every marriage breakdown represents a private tragedy and a public ill.

If proof were needed we have, indeed, only to look to nature. It is in the higher forms of life alone that parents care for their young, and only in man that the young are helpless and dependent for so long a span of years. Moreover, a family is normally so spread over the years that parents find that for most of their youth and middle-age their children are dependent upon them. The imperative

need to care for children over quite long periods is a fundamental reason for stable marriage. In recent years we have been very much reminded of it by our recognition that much delinquency and anti-social behaviour springs from the want of a secure and happy home. When, further, we consider that one illegitimate child may cost the community thousands of pounds before leaving school, and that a delinquent child may cost far more, we must acknowledge that even in the most mundane terms the effects of instability in marriage have an enormous impact on society; while in terms of human suffering the cost is incalculable.

## The Position of Marriage Today

Let us turn, then, to a consideration of the position of marriage in this country. The last year for which the Registrar-General has provided full figures is 1949,<sup>†</sup> and a consideration of them seems at first sight to show a gloomy picture. In England and Wales the number of dissolutions of marriage made absolute in the peak year (1947) was some 60,000, which was about ten times the pre-war annual average. By 1949 the total had fallen to about 34,000, and I believe that in 1950 it will be found to be around 30,000.

The latest figures show that one marriage breakdown came before the courts concurrently with every six new marriages that were contracted. This statement must be treated with some reserve. In the first place it does not, of course, mean that one marriage in six breaks down. This might be suggested from the fact that the proportion has remained similar over some years, but there are many factors to take into account, especially the fact that the same marriage breakdowns often come before the Magistrates' Court and later before the Divorce Court. On the other

\* A paper read at a members' meeting of the *Eugenics Society* on Tuesday, March 18th, 1952.

<sup>†</sup> *Statistical Review of England and Wales for the year 1949*. Tables. Part II. Civil. H.M.S.O. Price 4s.

hand there are, of course, many unsatisfactory marriages that never come before the courts.

The 1949 figures show that, I think for the first time, there were more divorced men and women marrying than widowers and widows. Moreover, if we consider only those marriages where the wife is still of child-bearing age, we find that more are broken by divorce than by death. This arises, of course, in part from the success of medical science in staving off death longer. It is nevertheless of great significance from the point of view of population policies, and from the viewpoint of countless individual children.

For some years now the Registrar-General has published figures showing the interval between marriage and the birth of children. Thus if we take the number of illegitimate births and add to it the number of births occurring within about eight months after marriage, we find that about one child in eight was conceived outside marriage. It also becomes evident that nearly one in every six brides was pregnant on her wedding day, the proportion in the case of brides under the age of 21 being more than one in four. When one considers how widespread is the knowledge and use of contraception, it seems reasonable to assume that the real extent of pre-marital relations must be very much greater.

Compared with the records of our grandparents it certainly seems that marriage is much less stable today. But while the extent of marriage breakdown is alarming, it must be noted that quantitatively there is much more marriage today, so that some increase in the casualties might be expected. In the first place, people tend to marry younger, and some 30 per cent of the married women in England and Wales are married before they are 21. In the second place, more of them get married. It is very remarkable that since 1911 there has been an increase of about 20 per cent in the number of people married. In 1931 52 per cent of all women aged 16 to 50 were married, whereas by 1945 the percentage was 62. Thirdly, we tend to live longer—especially if we are married.\* But

when all these allowances have been made it remains true that marriage breakdown has greatly increased in our modern society, especially since the war.

### Reasons for Marriage Breakdown

Naturally many reasons have been advanced for the increasing breakdown of marriage. Some say that it follows a decline in religious observance in the country; others that the separation and loneliness of the war years wrecked marriages that would otherwise have prospered. Almost everyone agrees that the shortage of houses plays a tragic part. All these factors enter into the matter, and many more besides, including in-laws, selfishness, emotional immaturity, marriages forced upon young people because a child is on the way, the false values of the films and the tendency to regard sexual harmony as the sole criterion of marriage.

But the disruption of family ties has not been only in this country. It can be seen in almost every country of the world, although they have different religions; although some of them escaped the war; and although some of them have enough houses. Behind the obvious precipitating causes there seems to be some underlying reason for a world-wide change in attitudes towards marriage and the family.

### Equality of the Sexes

I shall probably court misunderstanding if I state my thesis bluntly; but in truth it is the new equality of women with men that has led inevitably to the disruption, for the present, of stable marriage and family life. Lest this sound as if I were some old buffer in side-whiskers and drainpipe trousers lamenting that things are not what they were in Queen Victoria's day, let me say that I believe strongly in the essential equality of the sexes. It has, however, far wider social implications than have so far been generally recognized.

This has been called the Century of the Common Man. In all sorts of ways there has been a trend to equality—equality between Jack and his master, equality of rights for different religions, races and colours. Most of

\* *The Registrar-General's Statistical Review of England and Wales, 1946 and 1947. Volume I, Medical.* H.M.S.O. Price 6s. 6d.

all the first half of this twentieth century has seen the equality of women with men. It has come slowly enough not to excite much comment, yet in terms of history it has come like a flash. People over fifty can remember women chaining themselves to the railings outside the House of Commons as Suffragettes in the movement for "votes for women"; but already in the world of 1952 it seems very odd that there should have been a time when women were denied the vote—so quickly has the equality of women been accepted.

It was a brave, idealistic movement for the equality of women in the early part of this century. It was largely directed by intelligent women demanding that they should have the same right as men to enter the professions, vote and sit in Parliament. They pressed the intellectual claims of women and their right to compete equally with men. They tended to say—to adapt words that have since become famous—"Anything you can do, I can do better."

In the main, of course, they won their battle. Women have entered all the professions except the Church. They have the vote from the same age as men. They sit in the House of Commons, though not yet in the House of Lords. More and more women are working in shops and offices and factories, doing almost every job that men do except those involving heavy manual work. In the first world war women drove ambulances. In the second, they did many jobs that the soldiers had done before, sometimes in active service alongside the men. All this made it seem still more a matter of course that women should be accepted as equals with men.

Now in politics and the professions this equality has had much less effect than anyone thought it would have. The old ladies who were Suffragettes must, in their private hearts, be disappointed. There are women M.P.s, doctors, lawyers, journalists, and everyone accepts it as a very good thing; but it has not really altered the way in which politics, medicine, law and so on are conducted. The ardent pioneers of "votes for women" thought that, with a majority of women in the country, feminine voters would

lead us to a happier and more peaceful world. It does not really seem to have made much difference.

### **Equal Pay for Equal Work**

The feminist plea of today is for equal pay for equal work. What is more, most fair-minded people accept the justice of this; but at this stage the schoolmaster (for instance) comes along. "Why should the schoolmistress have equal pay?" he asks. "She's only got herself to keep, or else she's supplementing her husband's income; whereas I have a wife and three children. Surely that's not fair." Once again, everyone will agree with him.

There is only one way in which these viewpoints can be reconciled. This is by equal pay, supplemented by really substantial family allowances, so that the person with dependants is not worse off. It is the enormous cost of this that has so far held up "equal pay." It would mean that somehow the State would have to collect much more money in taxes and pay out much more to families. It is open to question whether it would be a good thing to have such a degree of intrusion by the State into the family; but it is the only just way of getting equal pay for equal work.

### **Grandfather's Day**

The equality of the sexes has had an even greater effect in the home than in the workshop. My grandfather used to say what was what; and my grandmother (dear little woman that she was) used to take it all from him. As for the children, they were, I am told, seen and not heard. Papa simply decided everything that mattered. Religious observance, the upbringing of the children, the spending of money—in all these things he usually laid down the law. If grandmama wanted a new dress, he would magnanimously let her have it, after telling her the material and colour that he thought appropriate, and very likely the price per yard. She had to accept what he said. She could not go out and get a job herself. Her dependence upon grandpapa was enforced by economic necessity and social custom alike. Her only way

of getting what she wanted was by subtle persuasion, about which she knew a good deal.

How different is the family today! Husband and wife, as equals, must somehow agree upon scores of matters that were not even open to discussion by their grandparents. For though of course there are many strange households here and there, in the main marriage has become a partnership of equals. It could not be otherwise. If men and women are equal, then husband and wife will regard themselves as equal. In the home they have got to reach joint decisions. Obviously there is far more chance of disagreement when there are far more things to be settled jointly.

### Modern Marriage Partnership

The truth is that this modern marriage partnership is a much richer and more worthy concept, with much more scope for husband and wife each to give of the best. But it is much more difficult. In the home, as in the State, dictatorship is clear-cut and definite, whereas a democratic sharing of responsibility is at once more worthwhile and more difficult. It can only be achieved by the attainment of a certain level of education and responsibility.

Now all this is not just the experience of our own country. It is world-wide. Wherever you get the equality of women emerging in law or in custom, there you get increased breakdown of marriage. Women have quickly achieved equality in some of the new states like India and Israel, Indonesia and Communist China. But the same result can be seen wherever we look today—in the U.S.A. or Japan or in Europe or Scandinavia. Wherever you get the equality of the sexes you get more divorce; and this tendency applies among peoples who are white, black, brown or yellow, and on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

What is to be the result of this inexorable drive for the equality of the sexes? It cannot be lightly dismissed with the comment of one of my small sons who (having been told by his mother to go and wash his neck) came downstairs announcing his discovery that

"Women cause nothing but trouble!" No, the equality of the sexes has come to stay. To our modern way of thought it seems intrinsically right, so that there can be no question of putting the clock back. The issue before us, now that we have got substantial equality, is its effect upon marriage, the home and the welfare of our children. The only other time in the whole of history when women enjoyed equality with men was in the later days of Rome; and there it may well have contributed to their disasters. The rich ceased to have children, and standards of loyalty and morality decayed. The equality of the sexes may be a means to good or ill; it is not an end in itself.

Of course when we say that the equality of women always causes more marriage breakdown, we really mean that the old idea of the patriarchal marriage breaks down. In this sense there is indeed a bright side to the picture of breakdown and change that we were considering just now. The modern "democratic" marriage of equal partners is a fuller and finer relationship but, as I have suggested, certainly more difficult. The early feminists took us on a false trail in demanding equality mainly in terms of competition with men along the same lines. We are instead coming to realize now that while men and women are of equal value they have essential differences of aptitude, outlook and function. Every modern marriage of thinking people presents husband and wife with the problem of reconciling equality with respect for differences.

Clearly this is a conundrum that can only be solved by mature men and women. Marriage today involves a greater task of tolerance and adjustment than ever before. Moreover, people are necessarily affected by the fact that almost everywhere divorce is commoner and more accepted than it used to be. If they are disappointed in their marriage the thought of escape will occur much more readily than it did to their grandparents. Increasingly people will not tolerate the mediocre marriage that our grandparents would have endured almost without comment. At the same time that marriage has

become more difficult, therefore, there tends to be ever more opportunity to abdicate from its responsibilities.

### **Formation of Marriage Guidance Council**

It was in these circumstances of increased strain upon marriage that the Marriage Guidance Council came to be formed in 1938 by a group of enlightened people under the leadership of that great and good man, Dr. Herbert Gray. It was at first no more than a small group of doctors, clergy and ministers, lawyers and social workers who were anxious to do whatever might prove possible to prevent marriage breakdown. I have deliberately put it in this rather negative way because it must be owned that, at first, the emphasis was more upon preventing marital disasters than upon the positive fostering of successful marriage that we now recognize as a greater aim. It was assumed, too, that ignorance—especially of sexual functions and attitudes—was the great enemy that was to be worsted by the spread of accurate knowledge, so that truth would be victorious and all would be well.

After a setback at the start of the war the Council was re-formed in 1942 with Dr. David R. Mace as its first general secretary. Its work went ahead throughout the country in a way that was quite phenomenal. The stress of war had made the public mind acutely aware both of the value of family life and of its precariousness in those unnatural days. People turned with avidity to a movement that offered them help in the preservation of threatened marriages, without being either shocked or censorious. At the end of the war, when people had more time for such activities, Marriage Guidance Councils tended to spring up in nearly all the main towns of the country with such vigour and rapidity that it was difficult to keep track of them all. What was more, there was a considerable danger of them working on different principles and by different methods; and while some variety might be desirable, it soon became clear that some standards must be set.

### **Principles of Marriage Guidance Councils**

Questions of principle were largely settled by the adoption of "ten points." These included our beliefs "That the right basis for personal and social life is that sexual intercourse should not take place outside marriage"; "That parenthood normally brings to marriage, not only the fulfilment of its racial end, but also the achievement of one of its deepest satisfactions; and that everything should therefore be done to promote fertile unions"; and another principle recognizing "That scientific contraception, while serving a purpose in assisting married couples to regulate the spacing of their children, becomes a danger when misused. . . ." From the first the movement recognized spiritual values as paramount, but never adopted any religious test, demanding only adherence to the "ten principles" that were in conformity with Christian and Jewish ethics but did not demand religious belief.

The difficult subject of divorce has never caused us serious trouble. The movement includes people of very different views on this subject, but we are united in the belief that the most important thing is to prevent, so far as possible, the desire for divorce. If we do this, we can agree to differ on divorce, which is a confession of failure. As we tell the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce in a memorandum, to revise the law of divorce without at the same time taking every possible step to foster successful marriage is like providing varied and comprehensive funeral arrangements without an adequate medical service.

Other points of principle arose. Help offered to couples in marriage difficulties must of course be offered in strict confidence, without which the public would not be justified in trusting our efforts. This raises knotty points of legal privilege, and while in practice we have always been able to avoid marriage counsellors being called to give evidence, in divorce cases, about what they have learned during attempted reconciliation, the position cannot be regarded as adequately safeguarded, and it is much to

be hoped that the Royal Commission will recommend legislation to deal with this important point.

Again, every effort is made to avoid being intrusive. People are not visited in their homes, save occasionally when both parties request it; for there must be no suggestion that the errant husband or wife is being "cornered" by some guardian of public morality come to bludgeon them into being good. A service is provided for those who desire it, and who come asking for help. This means that those who bring marriage difficulties to a marriage counsellor are a group that is weighted with people of some initiative and sense of responsibility, although of course many people come to Marriage Guidance Councils on referral from other social workers. It is a matter of satisfaction to us that people of every class, income and education do seek our help in marriage difficulties, from the most unlettered to people whose names are known to every newspaper reader.

It is also a matter of principle that in all marriage difficulties both sides should be urged to come for a confidential talk with a marriage counsellor. The ordinary man or woman is not going to regard it as just or responsible for anyone to attempt to give advice or treatment without first learning all the relevant facts, which can only be done from both husband and wife. It is, for instance, highly material to know whether acute jealousy is the result of some intolerable position that would make any of us jealous, or whether it is quite irrational. This information can seldom be learnt merely from the jealous person. I therefore take issue with that school of thought which does not always invite the other partner to a similar confidential talk. Failure to do this gives the impression of espousing the cause of a complainant against the other party; and it seems to me grossly unscientific to attempt a diagnosis without first securing all the available data. Of course, the second partner may not choose to come, and in this case one cannot reconcile people who are not even willing to discuss the possibility, though often a good deal can be done to help

the first partner to come to terms with the distressing circumstances. In the great majority of instances, however, the second partner proves willing to discuss the difficulty, although we neither have nor want any powers of compulsion.

I have laboured this point a little because it casts a light on the ethos and outlook of our movement. Those who deny that it is always necessary to give the second partner the opportunity of a hearing, are really thinking of the first partner as a patient needing help in readjustment to society, including husband or wife. The emphasis is upon the individual. For our part, we regard marriage not merely as one of the external relationships that is giving trouble to a patient, but as something of unique value. While we are deeply concerned with the individual, we are still more concerned with the couple and the family. To attempt to treat one partner without enlisting the aid of the other comes near to imposing a solution instead of guiding husband and wife to help each other to find a solution to their difficulties themselves.

### Marriage Counsellors

I have drifted into a discussion of the remedial side of our work because this came first in our development, and is still the best-known work of marriage guidance. We refer to it as remedial work rather than reconciliation because our object is to provide help in any kind of marriage difficulty. This of course includes involuntary childlessness, which affects something like one in every dozen married couples. Here there is normally no question of reconciliation, but a very real marriage problem that is, of course, referred to medical aid.

The remedial side of our work is carried out by "marriage counsellors," who are mature men and women selected and trained for the task. All of them are volunteers generously giving one evening a week, or perhaps two afternoons a week, to this work. Each of some eighty-five Marriage Guidance Councils has a panel of these counsellors, and each counsellor is thus dealing with only a limited number of cases at any one time. In our

view this has several advantages. In the first place it enables a Marriage Guidance Council to provide a variety of service, so that, according to the nature of the case, a couple can be referred to the counsellor who, from age and experience, is most likely to be able to help them. Secondly, it means that the counsellor can remember the details of the comparatively few cases being helped at any one time, and thus show a greater personal interest and friendship for each one. Thirdly, spreading the case-load in this way reduces the undoubted strain imposed by this work, which touches a good deal of the seamy side of life and sometimes involves very grave responsibilities, especially for the welfare of the children.

We know that voluntary service is often accepted by organizations that dare not examine credentials too closely for fear of losing valued help. In such delicate and responsible work as marriage counselling, however, we have from the first imposed rigorous selection and thorough training. Candidates must first be sponsored by a local Marriage Guidance Council, and then attend a residential selection conference at which they meet five selectors including a psychiatrist. The object of the selection is to choose for this work those who are really suited by temperament. They must on the one hand be sympathetic, tolerant, patient and free from prejudices, while on the other hand they must be analytical and objective, avoiding taking sides and free from inhibitions. This is a formidable combination of virtues, and the high proportion of about two-thirds of the candidates who pass the Selection Board springs largely from the fact that they are all sponsored already by local Councils that have considered them suitable. After this a training course relates to the spiritual, psychological, medical, legal and social aspects of sex, marriage and the family. This is followed by written work and a probationary year's counselling, concluding with a careful assessment of the work done. The result is that these marriage counsellors, of which there are over 300 throughout the country, form—so far as I know—by far the most carefully selected and thoroughly

trained voluntary social workers in the land. That men and women who give their time freely should be prepared to go through such selection and training—which is arranged by the national body to maintain consistently high standards throughout the country—gives eloquent testimony to their sincerity and selflessness, and their recognition of the delicacy and responsibility of their task.

One of the main objects of the training is to ensure that marriage counsellors recognize the limits of their competence, and the point at which difficulties should be passed on to professionally qualified help. Each Marriage Guidance Council, in addition to its rota of voluntary counsellors, has panels of doctors, psychologists, parsons and ministers, lawyers and social workers to whom the more difficult cases may be referred. Special care is taken to ensure that marriage counsellors do not attempt to exceed the limits of lay competence, which would be disastrous. On the other hand, they can often deal with straightforward marriage problems and spare the doctor, in particular, from being needlessly worried in his surgery by some simple matter that needs only a sympathetic explanation.

In practice, therefore, the marriage counsellor gives, let us say, each Thursday evening to this work. He is available at the consulting rooms, or it may be at his home, to see those who may seek his help in confidence. After seeing one party, he tries to see the other. If the difficulty is a comparatively simple one, he will, over a period, see each party several times, giving explanations and interpreting the outlook of each to the other, until it may be possible to see both parties together and get them jointly to face and overcome their difficulties. If, on the other hand, there are symptoms that clearly call for psychological treatment, or a situation with difficult legal implications, the counsellor will, with the consent of the couple, get them to see a psychiatrist or a lawyer who serves as a consultant of the Marriage Guidance Council.

### Conclusions from Remedial Work

The London Marriage Guidance Centre alone has helped over 10,000 couples in the past eight years, and throughout the country over 8,000 cases a year are assisted by marriage counsellors. From the remedial side of the work two clear conclusions stand out. First, that it is of the utmost importance to tackle marriage problems *promptly* when they arise. The natural reticence that people feel about their intimate worries makes them reluctant to seek help until a situation becomes quite intolerable, and drives them to drastic action. By this time there may be a legacy of frustration and bitterness and treachery—to say nothing of solid phalanxes of relatives—so great that their difficulties are beyond human help in our present state of knowledge. Secondly, the crucial factor is the *will* to succeed. Many warring couples, bemused by childish ideas or over-simplified psychology, come to Marriage Guidance Councils with a pathetic belief that we can, as it were, wave a magic wand over them and send them away arm-in-arm. Such faith in experts is touching, but it is not enough. In almost every case there is need for slow, patient effort in curbing tempers, admitting mistakes, refusing to take offence, learning afresh. While much skill and patience, sympathy and objectivity are needed of any reconciler, really determined effort is essential from those who would themselves overcome their difficulties.

### Government Support

The Denning Committee on Procedure in Matrimonial Causes\* made its final Report in February 1947, and among other things recommended State grants towards marriage guidance work. As a result the Home Office set up a Departmental Committee on Grants for the Development of Marriage Guidance as a form of social service (the Harris Committee), which in November 1948 recommended† some modest headquarters grants—£5,000 a year to the National Marriage Guidance Council, and £1,500 each to the

Catholic Marriage Advisory Council and the Family Welfare Association, for an experimental period of five years. In addition the Home Secretary was recommended to set up a Marriage Guidance Training Board to plan, supervise and finance the selection and training of marriage counsellors, up to a maximum cost of £5,000 a year, which was later reduced to £4,000. These recommendations were adopted, but not some others that were needed to support the work of the local Councils. The amounts were small, but as an essentially voluntary body we have never wished to be dependent upon Government grants, and have chiefly valued them as a token of official recognition of the value of marriage guidance work, though the money has been welcome to an organization much hampered for lack of it.

According to the estimates published in the last few days it is proposed to halve all these grants in the coming financial year, as a measure of economy. It is difficult to believe that this will be carried out, seeing that the taxpayer pays perhaps fifty times as much in subsidizing the divorces that formed 80 per cent of the cases receiving legal aid in the first year's operation of the Legal Aid and Advice Act, 1949.\*

### Education for Family Life

All this leads us to education for marriage and family life, which is so much more necessary now that marriage has become "democratized" into an equal partnership.

It is true that the Churches have usually felt some responsibility in preparing couples for marriage, and done much that has been of value. But—as I think, most unfortunately—fewer young people attend Churches today. The Churches themselves have not always seemed abreast of modern thought, as for example in this basic matter of the equality of women. Also the old taboo on discussion of sex matters has largely disappeared, leaving the Churches embarrassed and uneasy on the whole subject, and incidentally placing at a great disadvantage a celibate priesthood where this exists.

\* Cmd. 7024. H.M.S.O. Price 9d.

† Cmd. 7566. H.M.S.O. Price 6d.

\* Attorney-General: *House of Commons, Official Report*, December 3rd, 1951.



The problem is, then, to break in upon the cycle of the generations ; to set young people thinking about marriage and preparing themselves for it with as much enthusiasm and determination as they prepare for a job or career ; and to help them lay the foundations of such wise and happy marriages that serious difficulties never arise. This can hardly be better put than in a striking passage of the Final Report of the Denning Committee presented to Parliament in February 1947 :

" We have been much impressed by the evidence of experienced workers in this field that the basic causes of marriage failure are to be found in false ideas and unsound emotional attitudes developed before marriage, in youth, and even in childhood. The right time to correct those ideas and attitudes is before marriage. There is a need for a carefully graded system of general education for marriage, parenthood, and family living to be available to all young people as they grow up, through the enlightened co-operation of their parents, teachers and pastors ; and in addition specific marriage preparation of engaged couples to give them instruction and guidance to ensure the success of their marriage. Valuable work is already being done on these lines and its extension is much to be desired."\*

Our experience suggests that there are three or four points of particular significance at which education is possible for family life. This education, like training for citizenship, is concerned much more with infusing ideals and imparting attitudes than with the mere giving of information. Undoubtedly the formation of attitudes and the moulding of outlook begin in the nursery where the young child gains his impressions of what is normal and right. The greatest influences in education for family life are still the informal ones of home and family itself. The example of parents in love, in tolerance and in shared

ideals is a much more powerful and lasting influence than any direct instruction. Whether a person grows up selfish or unselfish—a vital matter to happiness in marriage—depends largely upon the early years, and upon the patience and understanding of the mother who encourages the child and gives him a sense of satisfaction and importance in participating in little family tasks and errands.

The first step, then, in education for family life rests with the parents, and one of the forms of educational work that my own organization hopes to develop still further is the assistance of parents in meeting responsibilities that they often feel more willing than able to fulfil. Many speakers have addressed Parent-Teacher Associations, and many Church groups are active in assisting young parents in the crowded years when the children are at once most noisy and troublesome and yet at their most impressionable.

### Sex Education

The question of specific sex education is one that I need only touch upon. Whether we like it or not, knowledge cannot be restrained in a free society. Unless sound and sensible information is given to children about sex they will learn highly coloured, garbled and often dangerous half-truths, in undesirable ways. It is never wise to keep a child in complete ignorance of sex. Secrecy inevitably suggests that the grown-ups regard it as a furtive and disgraceful subject. If a child gains such an impression it is likely to militate against his or her later married happiness, and to do far more harm than mere ignorance which may be dispersed by knowledge. That sex teaching should be given is certain. The question is rather *how* children should be taught. There can be no doubt that the parents are the best source of information that should be given naturally in answer to the children's questions as they arise and merely to that extent. After all, if a child feels that he cannot ask his own parents a sensible question, the very basis of trust and confidence is undermined. But I repeat that attitudes are more important here than factual information, and many

\* Page 5, Final Report of the Committee on Procedure in Matrimonial Causes, presented by the Lord High Chancellor to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, February 1947. Cmd. 7024. H.M.S.O. Price 9d.

parents are themselves too embarrassed or inhibited to talk about sex to their children or, more important, to present it as a natural, right and noble aspect of life. Thus it may often be necessary for teachers or others to deal with sex education, though this can only be a second-best. What matters is that, in dealing with all the kinks and convolutions of the tubes in our bodies, we should not fail to impart to our children the emotional, moral and spiritual significance of what is, after all, one of God's greatest wonders. To give biological instruction without any hint of moral standards may be a grave dis-service to children. There have been cases in which it has simply stimulated their natural curiosity to make sexual experiments. They can hardly be blamed for this if they have never been taught that men and women, having souls and minds, are not just so many guinea-pigs. And it is more important that they should really lay hold of this truth than that they should know all about Fallopian tubes.

### Adolescence

A second opportunity comes to influence boys and girls around the ages of 15, 16 or 17. Intellectually they are almost adult but emotionally they are adolescent. This is often the main chance to influence them in their attitude towards the choice of a marriage partner. Once John and Mary have fallen in love and hope to get married, it is useless to talk to them of the qualities that go to make a loyal and loving wife or husband. They will only listen with one ear, and only take notice of anything that happens to coincide with the attributes of Mary or John. They are, in short, emotionally committed and often unable to consider marriage in long-term fashion, taking account of courtship, companionship, children, middle-age and the later years when the children have left home. It is before John and Mary have fallen in love that they should be set thinking about marriage itself, and what it involves as a growing and evolving relationship that develops and changes as children come and go. If they can but grasp this elementary idea they are less likely to find,

later, that they have married someone with whom they have little or nothing in common when dancing days, or tennis days, are over. It is true that when they fall in love later they may be swept off their feet (and who would have it otherwise ?) ; but it is at least desirable that in their "teen-age" years they should have developed some sort of framework of values against which they can measure those whom they meet of the opposite sex.

Boys and girls who have had a sensible sex education ought, by this "teen-age stage," to have it developed to give them some understanding of the different ways in which men and women tend to view sex and marriage. It is well for young people to understand how lightly and quickly strong emotions may be aroused in a young man ; how much more mature and deliberate is a young woman of the same age. Often disharmony arises later because husband or wife is expecting the other to look at things in exactly the same way.

If a married couple, for example, postpone parenthood year after year, the husband may well be happy enough, while the wife is deprived and frustrated because conception, gestation, birth and the nurturing of the child is the completion and fulfilment of her sex experience, as it can never be for the husband.

The practical problem arises as to how one may reach and influence adolescent boys and girls. My own organization has experience of providing speakers to many youth groups and Church groups and this is certainly valuable, especially if audiences can be addressed who have not only met for that subject but who gather regularly to discuss many different things. The fact remains that it is, on the whole, the more responsible boys and girls who belong to Churches, clubs and societies. It is the feckless and unattached who most of all need encouragement to think about marriage as a most important part of the life that lies ahead.

We have not found the full answer to this problem. Newspapers, cinema and the radio are almost the only influences that reach the less responsible youngsters. In the

newspapers of the type they read, the activities of Aly Khan and Miss Rita Hayworth tend to receive more prominence than anything that has to do with maturity and responsibility in marriage. Nevertheless, there are great opportunities for influencing people through popular newspaper articles and the answering of readers' queries in regular newspaper features. One London evening paper has printed such a feature (which is syndicated throughout the provincial Press) each week for seven years. It may be distasteful to some professional people to see statistics or legal or medical knowledge simplified into popular, chatty, journalism; but it is almost the only way in which the knowledge of the expert can be brought to the ordinary man or woman.

### Engaged Couples

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for education for family life is with the engaged couple. The choice of partner has been made and now they know that when they marry they are setting out on an adventure into uncharted seas so that they need both a knowledge of navigation and an idea of the reefs and shoals to be avoided. The Marriage Guidance Councils have almost all found young people increasingly anxious to seek help in preparation for marriage. In 1950 some 1,300 engaged couples asked and received this help.

We are dealing here with those who have pledged themselves to marry and who want help on specific points, rather than generalities about marriage. Is it a good thing for a wife to go out to work? Ought they to wait until they have a home of their own before they start a family? Is it important that they should share religious beliefs? How often should sexual intercourse take place? How best can they use the family income? This is the sort of problem they present and on which they seek help.

Where it is possible, engaged couples are seen by a marriage counsellor. The interview may be in the consulting room of a Marriage Guidance Council or round the fireside in the counsellor's home. Like the interviews with those in marriage difficulties it is, of

course, entirely confidential. Alternatively, in the larger towns, two or three counsellors may, in turn, talk to a group of half a dozen or a dozen couples. This method is more satisfactory than it may sound, because it often serves to show each couple that their own anxieties and preoccupations are perfectly normal and shared by most other couples; but it is important to provide opportunities for private consultations afterwards for couples who may wish to raise particular difficulties on their own.

It is true that a large proportion of those coming for marriage preparation have come mainly to discuss family planning and spacing. It would be quite unreal to talk to young couples before marriage without being willing to discuss this issue. A thorough and impartial investigation\* conducted under the Royal Commission on Population that reported in June 1949, showed that at least two-thirds of the married couples in the country practise some sort of family planning, whether by appliance or non-appliance methods. My own organization believes that there are right, as there are certainly wrong, uses for contraception, though it is for each couple conscientiously to decide such matters for themselves. The function of the marriage counsellor where contraception is concerned is merely to ensure that the couple have correct information (and there are still some who have the most bizarre misunderstandings) and that they recognize the subject as a moral one that needs their conscientious and united decision, if possible before marriage. The majority regard contraception as a necessity in the early years of marriage and they are referred to appropriate doctors or the clinics of the Family Planning Association.

But if couples come to Marriage Guidance Councils largely to discuss family planning—in the belief that they already know everything else about marriage!—our marriage counsellors take the opportunity to broaden

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\* *Papers of the Royal Commission on Population*, Volume 1. An investigation carried out by the Council of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: *Family Limitation and its Influence on Human Fertility during the past Fifty Years*. H.M.S.O. Price 4s.

discussions to a much wider basis. Most eager young couples are thinking of the little home they plan and concentrating almost entirely on the immediate future. That marriage is a growing, dynamic relationship, enriched with the arrival of the children and changing with their growth and departure from the home, is a fundamental that they may not realize. They may think that they will marry and, automatically and effortlessly, live happily ever after, whereas constant consideration and readjustments are needed. Not only can the need for tolerance and co-operation be underlined but some of the particular hurdles can be pointed out. When the first baby comes, for instance, how often does the husband resent the fact that he appears no longer in sole possession of his wife's affections? These things are commonplace to those who have seen them many times. To each young husband it is new and disturbing. The very fact that marriage necessarily involves difficulties and challenges may not have been recognized by the idyllic couple, who may thus be plunged into depression and resentment when the first cloud appears.

Ideally we should certainly encourage all young men and women to have medical examinations before marriage. This is highly desirable and considerate couples feel that they owe it to each other. Since, however, doctors are now so overworked we content ourselves at present with the definite suggestion that medical advice should always be sought by those who have any doubt about general health, sex functions, or heredity. We always encourage reference to the family doctor and other procedure agreed with the British Medical Association only comes into effect if the patient is unwilling to go to his or her family doctor or if the family doctor is unwilling to help.

It goes without saying that every couple

who are being married in a church are encouraged to see the priest or minister who will conduct the service. Without doubt all the Churches have been taking this responsibility more seriously, and clergymen usually regard it as a definite obligation to see the couple beforehand. This is much to be welcomed. Marriage Guidance Councils are at pains not to compete with either the clergyman or the doctor, but to co-operate with both; for neither of them would claim to be competent to deal with every aspect of the many-sided relationship of marriage.

Above all, in presuming to offer help to young couples in preparation for marriage we must be very sensitive to their ideals and anxieties at a most precious and beautiful stage of their lives. I have been talking in general terms and statistics this afternoon as I have imagined to be appropriate before a learned society. But the subject of marriage cannot be treated as an impersonal one.

In my office, which really has no other advantages to recommend it, my window looks out over a roof garden of a neighbouring building. There in the summer time facetious young men photograph hard-bitten young women modelling the latest fashions and leaning against the balustrading. As if this were not sufficiently disturbing to the dictation of correspondence, lunch time brings young men and girls to hold hands while they eat their sandwiches. Sometimes then the years seem to slip away and I am reminded of the lines of W. B. Yeats—

“Had I the Heaven's embroidered cloths  
Enwrought with gold and silver light

I would spread the cloths under your feet :  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams ;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet :  
Tread softly because you tread on my  
dreams.”